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Defectors: CIA Broke Promises

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Washington — Five years after they defected to the United States, two former Soviet bloc officials speak bitterly of their handling by the Central Intelligence Agency, which they say pumped them and dumped them.

Nicolae Horodincea and Nicola Traian, both Romanians, currently are working in the United States at jobs far below their level of skill, intelligence and education. Horodincea, a former press and congressional relations counselor in the embassy in Washington, is now repairing electronic typewriters. Traian, a former embassy intelligence station chief, works in an import-export firm. Each earns about \$15,000 a year.

Neither has U.S. citizenship nor a current relationship with the CIA. Horodincea says he never received the promised lump sum settlement from the agency. Traian, who did, tried to re-defect last year to Romania. Drawing his last savings, he took his wife and two children to Vienna and applied for tourist visas from the Romanian government. The family was refused visas and returned to the United States.

Their accounts may shed light on the intelligence debacle that occurred last week when Vitaly Yurchenko, one of the highest-ranking KGB officials to seek U.S. asylum in decades, announced he was returning to the Soviet Union.

The Senate Select Committee on Intelligence did a year-long investigation of CIA handling of defectors after the complaints of Horodincea and Traian — they have since changed their names — surfaced in news accounts. In 1982 the panel called for a thorough review of CIA procedures as well as a financial settlement with the two Romanians. "In our judgment, the climate for defection is being chilled by CIA procedures," then-staff Chairman Robert Simmons said.

But little seems to have changed. Some of the CIA personnel associated with the handling of the two Romanians were replaced but not the practices.

"The basic problem is that only mediocrities go into that area. It is not fertile ground for promotion," said Simmons, who now teaches at Yale. "In the military, only those who have had command jobs get promoted. In the CIA clandestine branch, you can never get from GS-12 to GS-13 unless you recruit live agents. Managing defectors will not get you a promotion."

In fact, the agency only has to look after a tiny number of defectors at any time. The Senate report said that from 1969 to 1982 about 150 intelligence, diplomatic or other foreign officials who sought political asylum in the United States.

Horodincea and Traian both assert that CIA personnel broke their promises to provide comfortable settlements and assistance in adapting to life in the United States. When they went public with their complaints, they say, the CIA retaliated by cutting off their support. They say that was another example of how the agency took advantage of their vulnerability as individuals who betrayed their countries and are seeking a life in the United States.

"So long as they consider you a person without choice, they don't respect you," Horodincea said on Friday. "They have you in their power. They can kill you softly. It's a battle of wills. You are alone, yourself, against the whole clique."

Horodincea, who defected in March, 1980, was most bitter that agency officials supposedly told congressional investigators and lawyers who were looking into his case that he was "mentally unstable, a pathological liar, lazy and wanted only to get rich." "What I wanted was a job," he said.

Horodincea, 39, had a law degree in Romania and is an astute analyst of East-West affairs. After four years at a Northern Virginia community college that led to an associate degree in electronics, Horodincea found a job as an electronic-typewriter repairman with a major business machine firm. He calculates he takes home \$4 an hour. He can't work for other firms because they don't hire foreign nationals. He cannot get U.S. citizenship until he has been in the United States for 10 years.

His past follows him about. Six months ago he went to service typewriters at the FBI headquarters in Washington, as he had for the previous 18 months. This time he was stopped at the entrance. "They asked me to wait. I waited for 15 minutes. Then they said: 'We don't need your services any more.'"

Traian, 36, who defected in November, 1979, came to a settlement with the CIA, but only after a bitter stand-off two years ago that ended with his hiring a lawyer to represent him. First, the CIA insisted that he submit to a new series of lie-detector tests. He said they were held in different locations. He had no legal counsel with him and maintains that the polygraph operator deliberately attempted to provoke him into anger and confusion. The agency later informed the Senate Intelligence Committee that Traian had been proven to be dishonest. The CIA has not commented publicly on their cases.

Traian secured what his lawyer called a modest settlement, apparently \$20,000 or less compared with the \$1 million Yurchenko said he was promised, and invested it in a share of a house. But he was unable to meet the mortgage payments and lost the house.

When he attempted to return to Romania in summer, 1984, he told acquaintances that he had been unable to find a decent job. He met Romanian embassy officials in Washington, but was unable to obtain a visa from them. So, in a desperate move, he flew with his family on Icelandic airlines to Luxembourg, packed them onto a train and arrived in Vienna. Denied the visa there, they turned around. Traian was subsequently informed by relatives in Romania that he would have faced a miserable fate had the Romanian government let him in.

Horodincea, whose wife returned to Romania and remarried and whose son lives there, plans to stay in the United States because "I try to make the best of what I am here." But he also states that he would have nothing to lose in returning.

He has two regrets. One is not hiring a lawyer the day he defected. The second is that he stayed. "I should have done like Yurchenko," he said. He added that remaining here "isn't a test of character. It is a matter of survival. I've survived, but at the lowest edge of the margin of survival."